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NSC BRIEFING 21 January 1954

INDOCHINA

I. Chinese aid to the Viet Minh:

A. General Navarre and Commissioner General Dejean during recent weeks have spoken of a "great increase" in Chinese aid to the Viet Minh.

B. General Cogny, French commander in Tonkin, on 14 January said that the enemy around Dien Bien Phu appears to be making "a maximum logistic effort" on a scale hitherto unknown, using "tens of thousands of coolies" and large convoys of trucks.

C. These statements suggest that the Viet Minh has been greatly strengthened by Chinese aid for their current campaign.

NSA, DIA reviews completed

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D. The aid picture as we see it is this:

1. The army attache in Saigon said on 29 December that his check with all available sources failed to confirm Navarre's and Dejean's allegations of an increase.

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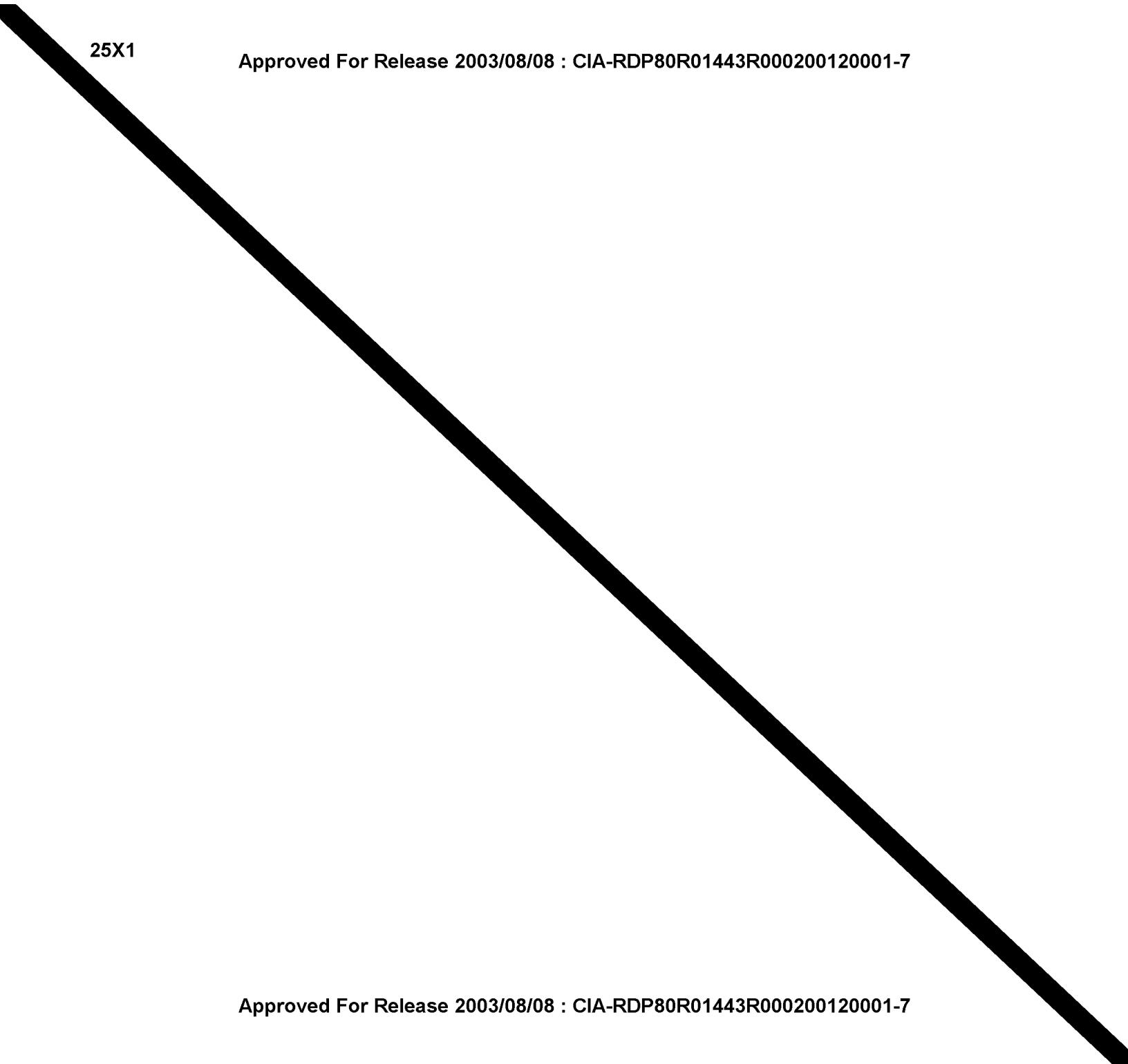

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4. In the absence of any firm information, there seems no justification at this time to change our former estimate of a monthly average of 900 to 1,000 tons of aid being shipped to the Viet Minh. These figures were carried through most of 1953 and represented a monthly increase over 1952 of about 500 tons.

II. The Viet Minh's ordnance situation:

A. There is no firm information on the quantities of certain weapons the Viet Minh is known or is believed to possess. The following figures, therefore, represent "best guesses":

1. The largest artillery weapon is the 105-mm howitzer, and there may be 20 in Viet Minh hands.

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2. The enemy also has perhaps 25-75mm howitzers.

3. The enemy has about 700 mortars, varying in size from 60-mm to 120-mm.

4. Recoilless rifles, 57-mm and 60-mm, total about 200.

5. Among antiaircraft weapons, the Viet Minh has about 400 12.7-mm machineguns, perhaps six 20-mm AA artillery, and less than 20 37-mm.

B. In the vicinity of Dien Bien Phu, the picture is even less accurate.

1. The French believe that two regiments of artillery - totaling about 20-75mm and 16-105mm pieces - are en route to Dien Bien Phu. No firm information has been received since they left their base area north of the delta on 29 December.

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2. Our most recent cable from the army attache, dated 19 January, says the French believe that one of the artillery regiments may now be located in a ravine west of Dien Bien Phu.

3. [redacted] 25X6

AA units are moving toward Dien Bien Phu, an estimated 15 weapons in all. It is also reported that between 3,000 and 10,000 37-mm shells are stored at Guan Giao, some 20 miles northwest of Dien Bien Phu. [redacted] 25X6

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4. No antiaircraft weapons have yet been fired in the Dien Bien Phu area. However, the French believe that there are approximately 54-12.7mm AA machineguns (the usual Viet Minh weapon) around the outpost.

5. The enemy has been firing some 81mm mortars in the area.

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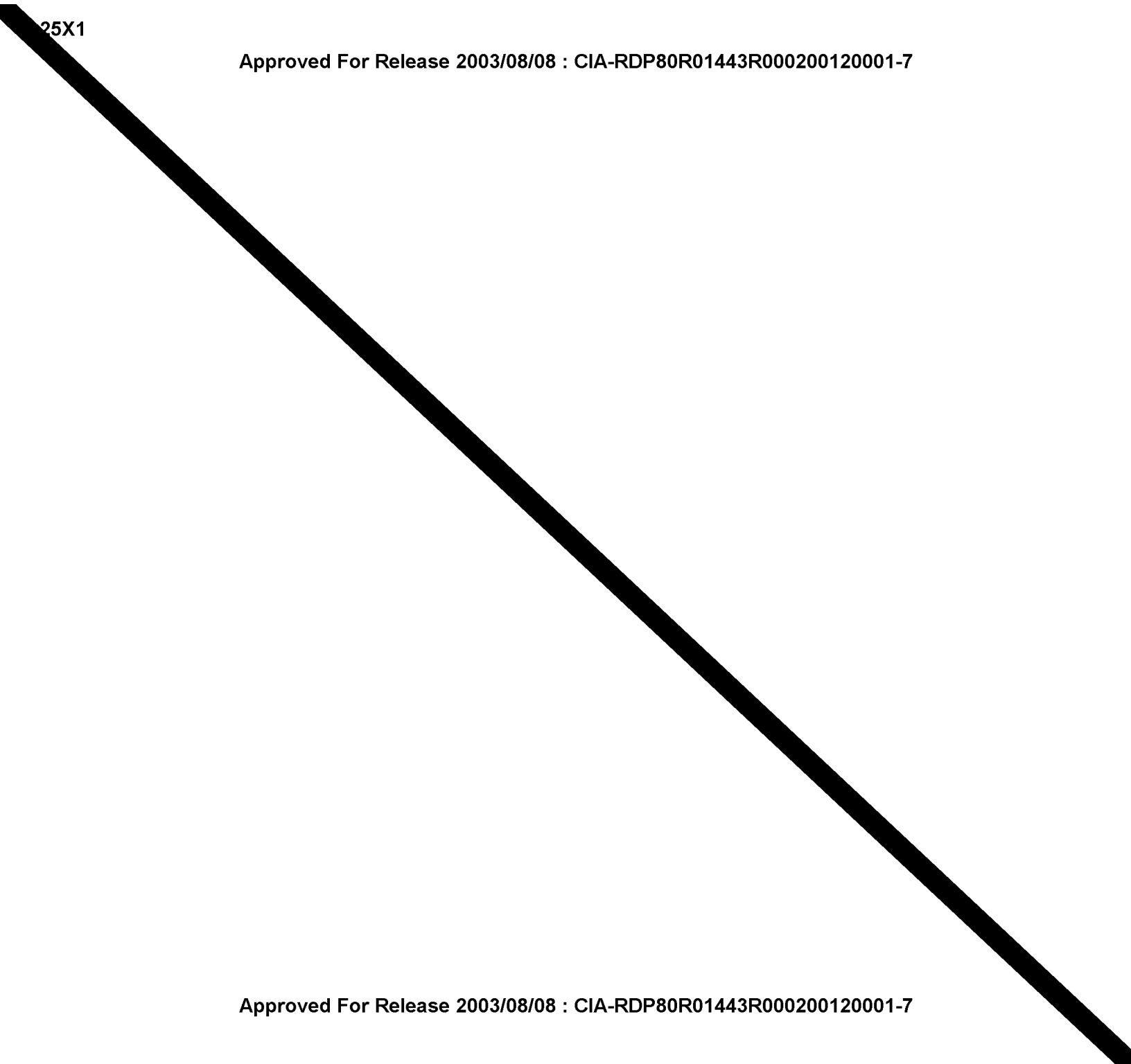

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IV. The French defensive position at Dien Bien Phu:

A. Dien Bien Phu is situated on a gently rolling plain at an altitude of 1,000 to 2,000 feet above sea level. It is surrounded, within a few miles of the town's center, by hills ranging in height from 1,000 to 4,000 feet above the plain. A river running beside the town assures a source of water.

B. On the plain, for a total distance of six miles north and south of the town, the French have established their defensive position, with a total of 12 infantry and three artillery battalions. This has been divided into three sectors:

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1. The North Sector has three infantry battalions plus one company of 120-mm mortars.
2. The Center Sector has seven infantry battalions plus four batteries of 105mm howitzers, one company of 120mm mortars, and two platoons of light tanks.
3. The South Sector has two infantry battalions plus two batteries of 105mm howitzers, one battery of 155mm howitzers, and one platoon of light tanks.

C. Col. De Castries, commanding, has fortified the general position with about 1,200 tons of barbed wire and dug-in fortifications. He plans to use the areas between major strongpoints as "killing grounds."

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D. The French have also improved the main airstrip, about one mile north of the village. It now has two parallel runways, one with a permanent surface. They are building an auxiliary strip about two miles south of town, on which to base fighters if the main strip becomes unusable owing to Viet Minh action, but this new field is not easily defensible.

E. French General Cogny appears confident that Dien Bien Phu can hold, pointing to its strength which exceeds that of Na San in 1952. Battalion commanders and the staff at Dien Bien Phu have expressed some disagreement: although the French are stronger now in artillery and armor, they are very dispersed.

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V. French request for more US air aid:

A. The French government has submitted a request for additional American aid designed to increase the French air effort in Indochina by about 30 percent.

B. Specific requests are made for retention of the 12 C-119 transports already on loan, for reinforcement of two B-26 groups from 16 planes each to 25 each, for 25 more B-26's to constitute a third group of these bombers, and for upwards of 400 American ground personnel to service transport and bomber aircraft. The Americans would serve temporarily and as civilians.

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C. The French have always suffered most seriously a lack of air crews and maintenance personnel, so much so that they usually have been unable to use to full effect their planes already on hand.

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D. Both French and American air transport officials have said the C-119 is not suitable for operations in Indochina.

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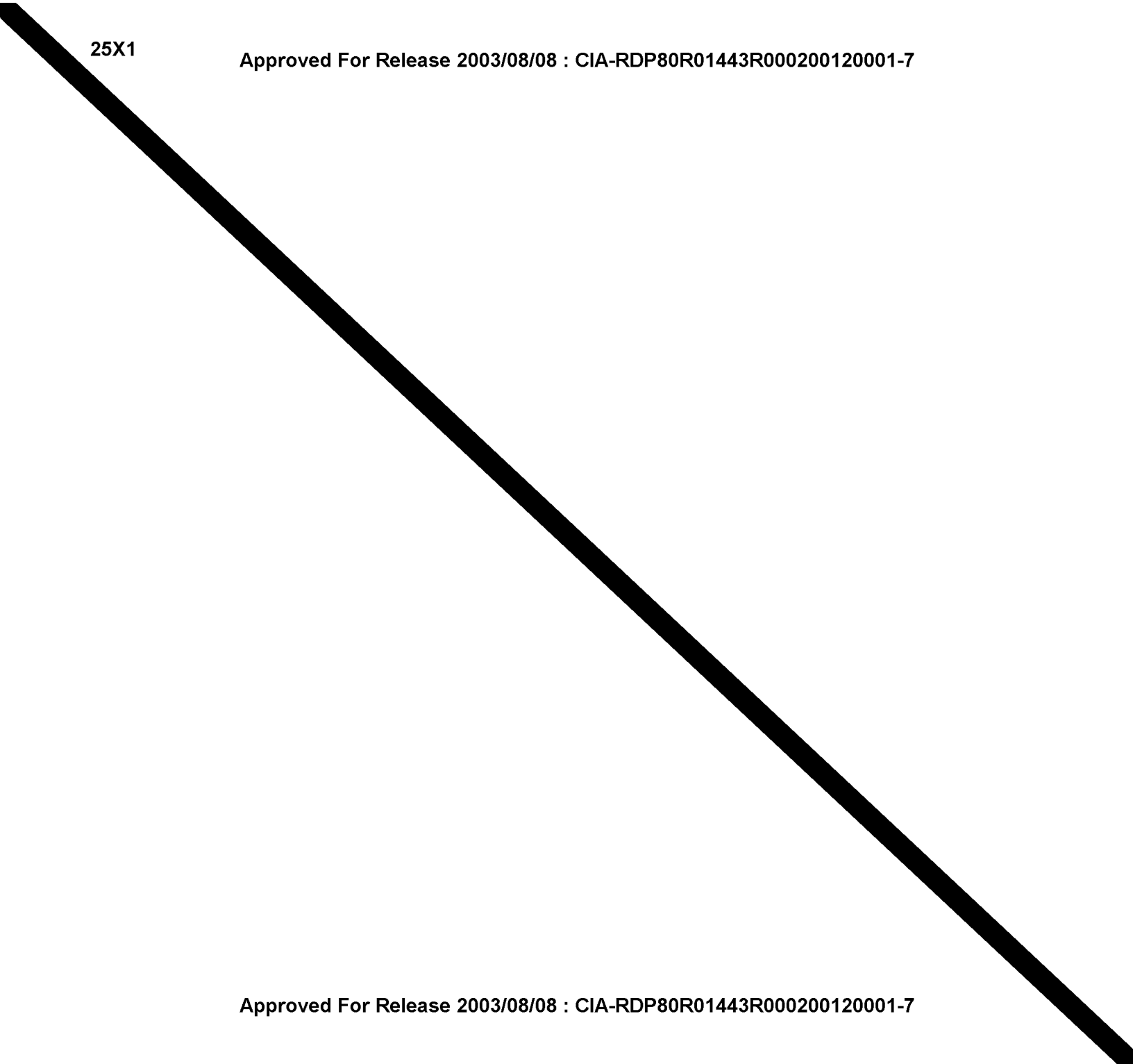

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